

College students discover Net addiction

By ELISSA LEIBOWITZ

Jennifer had one worry this Christmas break: would she be able to survive her month-long winter break at home?

It wasn't the fear of a stressful Christmas dinner or too much time bonding with her family that put the University of Massachusetts sophomore on edge. The downtime from school brought with it down time from her computer — and the Internet. For the first time all semester, she could not log on every night.

"I might go back early," said Jennifer, who asked that her last name not be used, "because I really don't want to be away that long."

Away from school, or away from her computer?

"Well, I like school, and it's kinda slow at home, but my computer is part of it," she said in an interview via a computer bulletin board service. "My hobby is the Internet."

Hobby or obsession? Some college officials and students alike are beginning to ask that same question, because as more students gain access to the computer



information network, the more some students become addicted. Instead of doing school work or hanging out with friends or even sleeping, some students are jetsetting all over the world via their mouse and keyboard. And like many other habits, the Internet can become an obsession, say university counselors.

The majority of students are like Jennifer — they use the Internet socially, said Jane Morgan Bost of the University of Texas in Austin. But "we've been hearing more and more from students and colleagues about people who could actually be having a problem with it," said Bost, the assistant director of programming at UT's Counseling and Mental Health Center. "I really didn't see it as a problem until other people started mentioning it in (counseling)."

A University of Michigan study last year found that fresh-

men and sophomores log on for an average 10 hours a week, while 18 percent of them are on-line for at least 20 hours. Most of the students use the Internet to send electronic mail, to log onto bulletin board services and chat lines, or to cruise around the Internet's many World Wide Web sites.

In all, more than 24 million people age 16 or older use the Internet, according to a recent telephone poll of 4,200 Americans and Canadians by the Nielsen Media Research Company. That comes to 11 percent of the population, according to the study.

Jennifer said that the couple hours a night she logs on is simply her way of relieving stress, of taking a break from her studies. She completes her school work on time and says she knows when enough is enough.

Bost and her colleague, psychologist Kathy Scherer, started

Read this summer

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is compiling a dictionary of street language.

But the main plot involves a murder she has witnessed and the police detective investigating the case. Or is he involved? In fact, isn't his partner the man the narrator saw with the murder victim? And isn't he stalking her? This is a dark and potent story which will follow you home.

Mark Salzman's *The Soloist* begins oddly enough. "This morning I read an article suggesting that Saint Theresa of Avila, a 16th-century Spanish mystic noted for her ecstatic visions, suffered from a neurological disorder known to cause hallucinations." The narrator, cellist Renne

Sundheimer, a used-to-be child prodigy who lives in and for the past, is presently reduced to teaching a nine-year-old Korean genius and serving on a murder trial. He alone doesn't want to condemn the alleged murderer of a Buddhist monk. Sundheimer is still hoping his musical gift will return, but by the end he has learned enough about himself that he is able to move out of the past and look into the present. His journey is a terrific read.

Of course, more famous writers have lately published books (Updike's *In the Lilies of the Fields*, Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater*, and Andre Dubus' *Dancing After Hours*), but take a chance on these three for eventful summer fare.

an Internet workshop last year to explore how and why students are using the Internet.

Though turnout was small, Bost said she got the feeling using the Internet has the potential for some people to be as addictive as gambling or drinking.

"I personally feel like there are folks who abuse the Internet. How many and what percent do, we do not know that," she said.

University of Maryland officials in College Park, Md., have formed a support group called "Caught in the Net" to help students cut back on their computing habits. And some schools have banned students who have been found to hog computers in university computer centers, and others were fined for their use.

Jennifer, that University of Massachusetts student, said it dawned on her that she may be addicted one night after she logged onto a University of Iowa-based bulletin board service, which allows users from all over the world to chat with one another in real time.

"I was talking to several people at once one night, and when I looked up, I realized it was three in the morning. I had intended to just check my mail, send a note to my friend, and finish some reading for a class the next day," she explained. "I didn't even see or hear my roommate go to sleep."

And that, Jennifer said, snapped her out of it. She now limits herself to a few hours each night — after she has finished her work.

But not many students have that discipline. Scherer said, "It's like with any addiction — if you feel that it's a repeated pattern" and it starts to interfere with your regular activities, then it could become dangerous, she said. Just as gambling and drinking can be fun for some people in moderation, they can become serious addictions for others.

If students are worrying that their Internet time is infringing

on their lives, Bost said users should ask themselves the following questions:

- How and why are you using the Internet? Using it for research or work-related purposes is different from using it to chat with friends in far-off places. Students need to keep the two separated. After all, business and pleasure are rumored not to mix.

- Are you falling behind with your schoolwork? Many students who may be addicted to the Internet put off their homework "for just another hour," she said, in order to chat with friends for a while longer. Bost suggests using the Internet as a reward. Tell yourself you may only log on after your school work is completed, not before.

- Have you ever stayed awake all night chatting on the Internet instead of sleeping? That can be dangerous to your health and may be a sure sign that you may have an addiction problem.

- Are you isolating yourself from in-person interaction, such as going out with friends? Chatting on-line should add to your social interaction with other people, not replace it. Do not let the Internet become the only place you meet and interact with new people. Scherer also warns users to be wary of on-line romantic relationships, which have been known to work out but seldom do.

- If you have to pay for an on-line service, such as American Online or CompuServe, are you able to keep up with our payments? Luckily for most students, Internet use is free at most universities. For those users who have to pay, don't fall behind on your payments or it may affect your credit — not to mention your wallet.

And ironically, for the truly addicted who know they have a problem but just cannot stay away, several Internet users have established World Wide Web sites on Internet obsessions.

Are you a Netaholic?

To keep your on-line time in line, Jane Morgan Bost of the University of Texas in Austin suggests the following:

- Keep track of how long you are on and what you are using that time for.
- Be clear about when you are working and when you are playing.
- Use the Internet as a reward.
- Admit when you have a problem and seek help from the college.